

Overview Document



Learn to Train



Learn to Train Overview Document

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Welcome to Special Olympics and the *Learn to Train* (L2T) program. You as a coach are about to become involved in a crucial program within the organization for the development of athletes and ensuring they continue on to be Active for Life. Through the Learn to Train program, you will have the opportunity to change the lives of young athletes in an extremely positive and exciting way.

This compilation of lesson plans was developed to ensure that you as a coach have the tools to provide a positive and safe experience for athletes in your program. The resources are intended to offer a “turn-key” approach to setting up a sport specific practice that is age and developmentally appropriate for your group of athletes and help them transition into community programs.

The resources provide sport specific information targeted at athletes 13-18 years of age. It builds on the principles introduced in Active Start and FUNdamentals and continues building on improving motor and sport skills. It is our hope that the compilation of resources will provide a smoother transition for athletes coming out of the FUNdamentals program or being introduced to Special Olympics at a young age into the community programs. All the lesson plans within these resources have been designed for this group of athletes by sport specific experts and will focus on ensuring a successful athlete development pathway with age appropriate skills and games.



How to use this resource?

Based on the success of Special Olympics Canada's *Active Start* and *FUNDamentals* programs, combined with the need for transitioning athletes from the youth programs into community ones, Special Olympics Canada is looking at developing resources that correspond with the "*Learn to Train*" stage of the Long Term Athlete Development model (LTAD). These resources will provide an opportunity for athletes to continue to develop sport skills and enhance their fundamental movement skills in age appropriate training and competitions.

Through discussions with our stakeholders it is clear that although the rigid *Active Start* and *FUNDamentals* implementation model has been successful, the *Learn to Train* resources will need to follow a more versatile and flexible structure that will allow for regional differences, coaching expertise and an opportunity to integrate activities into community programs while maintaining a focus on age-appropriate skills.

Special Olympics Canada in collaboration with a number of National Sport Organizations have developed "sport packages" complete with lesson plans for each sport which focus on age appropriate activities (12-18yrs) for coaches to print off, circulate or use electronically. Based on the variety of sports it is rare that a program will have a coach that has sport specific training in the variety of sports offered, therefore these packages have been designed to allow coaches with very little sport technical training to run developmentally appropriate, skill based trainings.

In many instances SO programs do not have the critical mass to have a whole program dedicated to a specific age group so the goal of the packages is to provide different activities that can be incorporated into a training session of various abilities but remains age appropriate.



Picking the Sports:

When looking at the sports it is important to consult with your local SO office and ensure that there is an athlete pathway for those individuals in the desired sport before introducing a sport. The goal is to be able to transition athletes from the “*Learn to Train*” stage into other community programs so consider this a crucial stepping stone in their sport development. It is also important to think of what sports are being offered at a Provincial/Territorial level.

- Is there a community program offering this sport that athletes can logically transition into?
- Is this sport being offered at a Provincial/Territorial level?
- Do I as a coach have access to any necessary equipment?
- Do I have access to necessary facilities to properly offer this sport?
- Do I have the appropriate amount of athletes to introduce this sport?
- Are the athletes in my area interested in this sport?



As the coach you are the expert to working with your athletes and knowing what sports they will enjoy and the success of each lesson. The implementation of the program has been designed to be fluid and allow you to choose the sports you want to incorporate. Download or print the lesson plans and you should be good to go.

What is Long-Term Athlete Development?

Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is a framework for training and developing physical, mental, and emotional capacities in athletes based on stages of development. LTAD allows athletes the flexibility to move between competitive and recreational streams so that individuals are active and healthy throughout their lives. The overall goal of LTAD is to support lifelong wellness in all athletes.

A very important aspect of LTAD is that it is based on developmental age not chronological age. We know that children develop at different rates in different areas. This is particularly true of athletes with an intellectual disability. Therefore, sport programs can be modified to ensure the best fit for Special Olympics athletes.

Why is LTAD important for Special Olympics Canada?

While not the only organization providing sport programs, Special Olympics Canada (SOC) is in a position to continue being a leader and an agent for change by addressing current program issues and enhancing opportunities that assist athletes with an intellectual disability to achieve their personal physical activity and sport goals.

LTAD for Athletes with an Intellectual Disability



This diagram illustrates a long-term approach to developing athletes with an intellectual disability.

1. Awareness and First Contact/Recruitment: Individuals may become aware of and participate in their first Special Olympics program at any age and stage, depending on their previous sport exposure and experience. In many cases, individuals will “START” at the Active Start and FUNdamentals stages where physical literacy is the primary area of emphasis.
2. The Middle Stages of LTAD are Learning to Train, Training to Train, Learning to Compete, Training to Compete and Training to Win. Young athletes may choose to move along this continuum in order to optimize their potential. They may also choose to stay active and remain at a certain stage or move into the “Active for Life” stage.
3. It is expected that there will be a very large number of athletes in the Learning to Train and Active for Life stages. There will always be a place for athletes to have fun in sport, be fit, and compete in appropriate ways based on individual goals.

Learn to Train Rationale

The Special Olympics “*Learn to Train*” Program provides sport specific training for athletes with an intellectual disability, in a variety of sports suited to the Chapter, region or even coaches preference. *Learn to Train* has been created to be the next step in the athlete development pathway and is designed to act as a continuation for those athletes aged 13-18 who have graduated from the FUNdamentals program and/or are new to Special Olympics programming. This program focuses on develop sport-specific skills that will help transition the athletes into community programs while introducing rules and the start of game play.

Learning to Train is considered to be a transition point in LTAD. Athletes may choose to stay at this stage for an extended period of time before progressing to the next stage, which could be Active for Life or Training to Train. If the choice is Training to Train, an increased commitment will be necessary. Should participants choose to move to Active for Life, they have all the necessary fundamental motor skills to be able enjoy a variety of activities.

In the “*Learn to Train*” program athletes should be exploring a variety of sport experiences while aiming to be physically active every day. It is at this stage that athletes should start to determine if they have a particular enjoyment of specific sports and be given ample opportunity to repeat gross and fine motor movements in skill practice, including activities for agility, balance, and coordination. For more details on the Learning to Train stage please see Appendix A or visit www.canadiansportforlife.ca

It is from these concepts and rationale that this resource has been set-up as a multi-sport approach.



THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS MOVEMENT

The History of Special Olympics

Who We Are

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives by encouraging and empowering people with an intellectual disability, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide.

Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown to include nearly 3.1 million athletes in 228 programs in 175 countries, providing year-round sport training, athletic competition, and other related programs, including *Special Olympics Healthy Athletes™*.

Special Olympics provides people with an intellectual disability ongoing opportunities in a variety of Olympic-type sports so that they may realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and friendship.

Special Olympics in Canada

In June 1969, the first Special Olympics national competition was held in Toronto, less than one year after the movement was born on Chicago's Soldier Field. The event attracted 1,400 athletes with an intellectual disability from towns and cities across Canada competing in athletics, aquatics, and floor hockey. The event occurred thanks to Harry "Red" Foster. Inspired by what he had observed in Chicago in 1968, Foster, a broadcast legend, advertising executive, visionary, and philanthropist, worked tirelessly to bring the Special Olympics movement to this country.

Today, Special Olympics has expanded across Canada and is no longer simply a cycle of national competitions. The movement now enriches the lives of more than 38,000 individuals who are registered in its 17 Olympic-type winter and summer sport programs, run by local sport clubs. Also enriched are the lives of their families, friends, and supporters.

Sport Canada, a government agency within the Department of Canadian Heritage, recognizes Special Olympics as the main provider of these services to people whose primary diagnosis is an intellectual disability. Special Olympics is guided by the framework of the Long-Term Athlete Development Model, developed in association with Sport Canada.

The Canadian Connection

In the early 1960s, a group of students at Beverley School, an inner-city school in Toronto, became the test group for Dr. Frank Hayden, a sport scientist at the University of Toronto who was studying the effects of regular exercise on the fitness levels of children with an intellectual disability. Dr. Hayden's research was nothing short of groundbreaking. It debunked the prevailing mindset of the day, one that claimed that it was the disability itself that prevented these children from fully participating in play and recreation. Through rigorous scientific methodology, Dr. Hayden proved that it was simply the lack of opportunity to participate that caused their fitness levels to suffer. Given the opportunity, children with an intellectual disability could become physically fit and acquire the necessary skills to participate in sport. He also demonstrated the transformative effects of sport on such children.

Significantly, this research caught the attention of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and became the foundation upon which the Special Olympics movement was built.

DEVELOPING BASIC MOTOR SKILLS

The Basics

Basic motor/movement skills are the building blocks upon which all movement is based. When children are introduced to movement early in life, they develop the basic motor skills needed for future participation, not only in sports and games, but in activities necessary for daily activities. During the first five years of life, basic motor/movement skill patterns normally emerge as children deal with the challenges of locomotion and manipulate the numerous objects encountered in their environment. Children exhibit movements that appear to be quite random. As they develop, these movements become more orderly and recognizable. It is believed that the sequence of development of motor/movement skills is predictable and approximately the same for all children. However, in general, for a child with an intellectual disability, the progress of development is delayed. Most children with an intellectual disability lag in motor skill development. They may lack the balance, dexterity, coordination, and motor/movement skills necessary for performing daily activities.

Early intervention is especially important for children with an intellectual disability because of the developmental delay most exhibit. Those who receive instruction at an early age are much more capable of participating in more complex movement skills as they grow older.



The best way to develop basic motor/movement skills is through early intervention, practice, and working at their ability level. The more movement experiences to which children are exposed, the better their skills become because of the amount of practice time they receive. However, it is important to recognize that it is the quantity and quality of activity time that makes the difference. Special Olympics in Canada focuses on the development of the fundamental movement skills through the Active Start and FUNdamentals program which hopefully athletes entering your program have undertaken. If athletes are new to Special Olympics and sport in general it might be worthwhile to connect with your Chapter office and use the FUNdamentals resource to help with skill development.

DEVELOPING BASIC MOTOR SKILLS CONT.

The Skills

Although focused on in Active Start and FUNdamentals it is important for coaches to understand about Basic motor/movement skills. The building blocks are divided into three main areas: manipulation skills, transport skills, and balancing skills.

1. Manipulation Skills

These skills are associated with the ability to receive, handle, control, or propel an object with hands or feet or with an instrument.

Manipulation skills include:

- Rolling
- Bouncing
- Catching
- Kicking
- Underhand Throwing
- Overhand Throwing
- Striking

2. Transport Skills

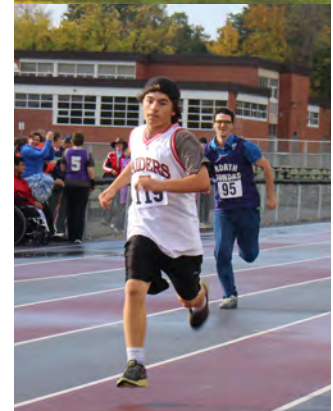
These skills enable an individual to move from one point to another.

Transport skills include:

- Running
- Jumping
- Hopping
- Galloping
- Skipping

3. Balancing Skills

These skills are necessary to maintain and control body position and posture while at rest or in motion. They are characterized as static (stationary) or dynamic (moving).



Special Olympics Manitoba - Pee-Wee Program Guide, 1997

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

(excerpt from FUNdamentals program)

It is important to keep a developmental perspective when working with children and youth in the physical activity setting. A number of factors contribute to skill development and the Council of Physical Education for Children has developed guidelines for movement programs. To provide the optimal learning environment to develop fundamental movement skills within these movement programs, it is recommended that six components of motor development be included when planning activities for children and youth.

- 1) Development is qualitative. Movement patterns will increase in mechanical efficiency. As a child acquires skills, the quality of performance increases.
- 2) Development is individual. Each child progresses through the same sequence, but goes at his or her own rate. To have generalized expectations of what each should be able to do is unrealistic because each will be at a different stage and development is dependent upon experience.
- 3) Development is sequential. Each child progresses from simple to more complex actions in a somewhat predetermined sequence. For example, crawling happens before walking and catching a large ball occurs before catching a smaller one. By understanding the sequence of development, coaches can plan progress.
- 4) Development is cumulative. Previously-learned skills are the building blocks for skills that develop later.
- 5) Development is directional. Rather than being static, development is progression towards a goal, or regression due to lack of practice.
- 6) Development is multi-factorial. The ability to perform a specific skill depends on a number of factors. For example, a child may be able to walk when he or she has sufficient understanding, strength, balance, and motivation. Many factors contribute to learning a new skill.



SAFETY AND EMERGENCY ACTION PLANNING

The safety of all athletes is paramount within any Special Olympics program and is the responsibility of all coaches and volunteers. Special Olympics safety guidelines ensure that athlete participation is conducted in a safe and positive environment.

Safety Guidelines

Practice Plans

- Ensure that practice plans provide an opportunity for progressive skill development. Modify the equipment or rules to be consistent with safety. Athletes will benefit from activities that show improvement.
- Try to develop a flow to the session and ensure that the athletes are continually moving. Long waits can cause them to lose interest and act out in dangerous behavior.
- Ensure that practice plans provide opportunities for simplification or extension. Young athletes need an optimal level of challenge for interest to be maintained; if an activity is too easy or too difficult, they lose interest.

Equipment

- Ensure that equipment accommodates ability, age, and physical development.
- Examine equipment before each session to ensure that it is not showing any signs of deterioration that could cause an injury.
- Test any equipment that has been modified to meet the needs of your athletes before using.
- Lock up equipment when it is not being used.

Environmental Risks

- Consider factors related to weather, including water on a playing surface, the heat or cold of the activity location, and humidity.

Safety Guidelines Cont.

Facilities

- Ensure that the facility meets the needs of your young athletes. For example, if your program has 20 participants, ensure that the facility is a gymnasium or community centre than can accommodate a large group.
- Check the facility, activity area, and restrooms before starting a session to ensure there are no hazards that could injure athletes or volunteers.
- The facility should not include dangerous equipment

Human Risk Factors

- Consider the athletes first when planning activities. The session should include activities that do not put them at risk and take into account their height, weight, ability, and strength.
- Match athletes for group or pair activities to ensure that those of even strength and ability levels are together.
- Be aware of any worrisome behaviours such as problems playing in a group, aggressive behaviour, inability to concentrate, or overall attitude toward physical fitness activities.
- Consider a coach's training, experience, and supervision abilities when assigning responsibilities.

Registration

- Ensure that athletes and volunteers fill out a Special Olympics Chapter registration and medical form before taking part in a Special Olympics program. The registration form ensures that any injuries are covered by insurance and are available through the local Chapter office.
- Have current medical information on hand for all athletes and volunteers. Place the information in a binder that is on site during each session.
- Have complete contact information for all athletes, volunteers, and emergency agencies.
- Get programming approval from the Provincial/Territorial Chapter before the program begins.

Emergency Action Plan

Create an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for responding to emergency situations. The EAP ensures that you can respond quickly and efficiently if an emergency occurs. In case of an emergency, calling 911 should always be your first step.

The EAP should always be designed keeping in mind the facility your program regularly uses for the sessions.

An EAP should include;

- the name of the person who is responsible in case of an emergency.
- a fully-charged cell phone or the location of a public phone.
- emergency phone numbers, including the facility manager, police, and fire department. Refer to your Special Olympics Provincial/Territorial medical form for athlete medical information.
- the address of the facility, including the closest intersection or local landmark to help emergency personnel find the facility as quickly as possible.
- a fully-stocked first aid kit.
- the name of the person who is assigned responsibility for calling emergency services. Ensure that she or he has detailed facility directions.

An EAP should be activated if an athlete;

- is not breathing.
- does not have a pulse.
- is bleeding excessively.
- is having difficulty staying conscious.
- has an injury to the back, neck, or head.
- has a visible trauma to a limb.

EAP Checklist

- Cell phone or knowledge of local access to phone
- Coins for a public phone
- List of emergency phone numbers
- Accurate directions to facility
- Participant information, including contact numbers and medical profile
- Personnel information — Who is in charge?
- Who will call emergency services?
- Who will supervise the other athletes?
- First aid kit

SAMPLE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Responsibilities of the “Charge Person”:

- Avoid risking further harm to the injured athlete by securing the area and sheltering her or him from the elements.
- Designate who is in charge of the other athletes.
- Protect yourself by wearing gloves if in contact with bodily fluids such as blood.
- Check that the airway is clear, breathing is present, a pulse is present, and there is no major bleeding.
- Stay with the injured athlete until emergency services arrive and he or she is transported.
- Fill in a medical incident report form.

Responsibilities of the “Call Person”:

- Call for emergency help.
- Provide the emergency dispatcher with all necessary information such as facility location, the nature of the injury, and if first aid has been provided.
- Clear any traffic from the entrance and access road before the ambulance arrives.
- Wait by the entrance to the facility to direct the ambulance when it arrives.
- Call the emergency contact person listed on the injured athlete’s medical profile.

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Appendix A: **PLANNING AN ACTIVITY**

Planning a session that meets the needs of young athletes and also ensures a safe and positive learning experience is crucial to the success of any sport program. The following information provides considerations that include the elements of a proper training session.

Points to Always Consider

- Ensure that activities are developmentally appropriate for the age, fitness, and ability level of the athletes.
- Engage the whole athlete (physical, cognitive, and affective) in the activity.
- Ensure that activities include age-appropriate cues that focus them on the key elements of the skill and help them to become successful.
- Ensure that the session starts with a warm-up and that the activities include a reasonable progression and challenge.
- Ensure that the activities and environment are appropriate for everyone and identify alternative activities that can be adapted according to each disability.
- Adjust activities for those who cannot perform them with the larger group.
- Provide opportunities for quality practice.

NOTE: Always have your EAP on hand and ensure that all volunteers are familiar with it.

Inspecting Facilities and Equipment

- Be fully aware of the specific safety standards related to the equipment used in your activity.
- Take an inventory of collective and individual equipment.
- Take an inventory of onsite first aid equipment. Carry a first aid kit at all times.
- Assess the safety of the facility, including walls, playing area, and lighting by completing a facility safety checklist.
- Identify environmental, equipment, facilities, and human risk factors.

Informing Caregivers and Athletes

- Inform caregivers and athletes of the risks inherent in the activities.
- Explain safety procedures and instructions related to all activities and ensure that they are understood by everyone.
- When explaining an activity during a session, highlight potential risks. For example, if athletes are required to cross paths, ask them to keep their heads up and be alert to where others are as they move around.

Supervising Activities

- Ensure that the number of athletes does not compromise adequate supervision and safety. The Learn to Train program should consist of a minimum quota of 1 coach for every 4 athletes.
- Keep in mind that young athletes need constant supervision. Stop all activities if you have to leave the site or delegate responsibility to a competent person.
- Look for signs of fatigue and aggression in the athletes and, if necessary, stop the activity.

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ACTIVITY PLANS

Key Characteristics and Objectives

Each group of lesson plans vary slightly depending on the sport organization that we worked with and the development of their resource. That being said a typical activity plan should involve the following components.

Warm-Up

A warm-up is an important component of an activity plan. When implemented properly, a warm-up can prevent many injuries. The warm-up gets the young athletes moving and should be designed to ready them for the activities to follow. The warm-up can be fun and accomplished by playing different games. However, be sure the warm-up incorporates the muscles that are going to be used during the lesson. Try to incorporate some form of mild stretching into the warm-up.

Introduction

The introduction can be incorporated into the warm-up. However, it can also be implemented separately. The introduction mainly introduces the skill the young athletes will be focusing on, describes the skill and how to perform it properly, and provides an example of the final goal.

Individual Skill Development

Individual skill development aims to develop specific skills that will help athletes participate in a wide variety of daily activities and leisure pursuits. The individual skills described in the sample activity plans are basic motor/movement skills. Most motor/movement skills are learned gradually and must follow a natural progression. Therefore, it is important to break each skill into simple steps. This will enable you to determine the level of complexity that each athlete can start practicing a skill. Also provided are key words and teaching cues that should be reinforced so they develop and understand movement vocabulary.

Specific Skill Games and Activities

Quality practice and repetition are essential for improving basic motor/movement skills. Specific skill games and activities aim to improve the motor/movement skill practiced in the previous lesson. These games and activities are a fun and effective way to practice individual skills.

Cool-Down

The cool-down is as important as the warm-up and allows athletes to move from a strenuous activity to a milder one and the body's temperature and muscles to return to normal. Again, some form of mild stretching should be done.

Special Olympics Manitoba - Pee-Wee Program Guide, 1997

ACTIVITY PLANS CONT.

Key Points to Consider in Your Practice Plans

1. Create an athlete-centered environment to promote learning.
 - Activities should stimulate the cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling,) and motor aspects of the young athlete.
2. Young athletes learn through their environment and through the guidance of coaches.
3. Optimally challenge each young athlete in the activity.
 - Provide opportunities to make the activity easier or harder based on individual needs.
 - Aim for each athlete to have an 80 % success rate in the activity to build confidence and feelings of competence.
4. Provide opportunities for the athlete to have a sense of control.
 - Give choice in equipment and activities.
5. Make the activities in each session FUN.
 - One of the main reasons athletes participate in physical activity is because they enjoy it.



Appendix B:

Adapted from information on the Canadian Sport for Life website
(www.canadiansportforlife.ca)

During the *Learn to Train* stage, youth should be converting their fundamental movement skills into fundamental sport skills. This stage is “*The Golden Age of Learning*” for specific sport skills. Youth in the *Learn to Train* stage are ready to begin training according to more formalized methods. However, the emphasis should still be on general sports skills suitable to a number of activities. As well, a greater amount of time should be spent training and practicing skills than competing.

It may be tempting to specialize at this age through excessive single sport training or early position specialization in team sports. This should be avoided in most sports. Inappropriate or premature specialization can be detrimental to later stages of athlete development if the child is playing a late specialization sport. Premature specialization promotes one-sided development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout.

The *Learn to Train* stage of LTAD is the most important stage for the development of sport-specific skills. This stage represents a sensitive period of accelerated adaptation to skills training and fine motor control. It is also a time when children enjoy practicing their skills and seeing their own improvement.

The Growth Spurt

The *Learn to Train* stage ends when the growth spurt begins. The growth spurt disrupts coordination and motor control, making it more difficult to pick up and develop new sport skills.

Specialization

It is still too early for specialization in late specialization sports, although many children at this age may have developed a preference for one sport. To maximize the long-term development of their athletic capacities, they need to engage in a broad range of activities, playing at least 2-3 different sports through the year.

Training more than Competing

While most children naturally enjoy healthy competition, skills training and practice should be the focus at *Learn to Train* – not winning. 70% of time in the sport should be spent in practice, and no more than 30% of time spent competing in formal games and competitions. (Competitive training activities count as part of the 70% training time.)

Focus on Learning Skills

This is the time to develop and refine all fundamental movement skills and learn overall sport skills. The brain is approaching adult size and complexity, and refined skill performance is easier to develop.

Appendix B Cont.:

Advantage of Late Developers

Late developers (those who enter puberty later than their peers) have an advantage when it comes to learning skills, as the Learn to Train stage lasts longer for them. They can often become better sport performers in the long term because of the longer period of skill development that they enjoy.

Disadvantage of Late Developers

Still, early bloomers often get selected over late bloomers because of the emphasis that coaches and parents often put on competition outcomes at the youth level. It is important that sport organizations provide late bloomers with an equal opportunity to train and develop within the sport, so that they do not get overlooked or excluded in the development of the larger pool of future athlete talent.

Variety of Sports and Physical Activities

By this stage, children have developed clear ideas about the sports they like. Their enthusiasm and personal sense of success should be encouraged. The focus should be on playing at least 2-3 sports in different seasons through the year. Children should not focus only on one sport for an entire year.

Training Flexibility, Stamina and Strength

This is an important time to work on flexibility. Stamina and strength should be developed through games, relays, and own-body weight exercises as opposed to more formalized physical training.



Thank you!



Special Olympics Canada would like to thank the following sport organizations for their guidance, contributions and collaboration in providing the quality resources that form the *Learn to Train* multi-sport program.

Athletics Canada



PGA of Canada



Canadian 5-Pin Bowlers' Association



Bowl Canada



Canada Basketball



FloorCurl



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